

Khuda Bakhsh Library

Journal

No. 160

April - June 2010



Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library
Patna

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Islamic Literature of the First Century Hijrah

— Zubair Zafar Khan

Introduction

Islamic literature emerged in the 6th century with the advent of Islam. The Holy Qur'an is the first among the Islamic literature. After the Qur'an, next is the collection and compilation of Hadith. Due to collection and preservation of the Islamic treasure of Knowledge, the Islamic literature enlarged rapidly within a short period. However, most of the publications of the first century Hijrah does not exist today but most of them are included in the later works of Islamic literature. It is an outstanding feature of Islam that its major part of original literature has been preserved successfully in its earliest days. However these days some scholars seem to be creating doubts regarding the authenticity of Quran and Ahadith. Their major censure is that in the life time of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and his companions the Islamic knowledge was not in written form. They were transmitted orally for a long time and were written by the scholars of later centuries. In this paper we have made an attempt to explore and mention the literature produced by the Sahaba [Companions of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)] and their close students (Tabain) in the first century Hijrah.

Compilation of Qur'an

The Qur'an is the earliest Arabic prose which came into being not from literary motives, but to serve religious and practical needs. So, first we will discuss the process of the revelation and compilation of Qur'an.

The Qur'anic revelation started one night during the month of Ramadan in 610 AD, when Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) believed that the angel Gabriel visited him, and conveyed the first messages from God. Muslim scholars believe that Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was not literate, as mentioned in the Qur'an itself, "Those who follow the messenger, the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) who can neither read nor write, whom they will find described in the Torah and the Gospel (which are) with them." Qur'an 7:157. He would memorize the divine revelation after listening, and later recite it to his companions, who also memorized it.

The initial revelations were recorded by different Sahaba (Companions of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)) by the order of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) on different sorts of parchments, tablets of stone, branches of date trees, animal skin, wood, leaves, leather and even bones etc.¹ Allusions to written portions of the Qur'an can be found in many events. Such as, immediately before his conversion in 615, Umar bin al-Khattab caught his sister reading the Qur'anic text (Taha) from a parchment. At Madinah, about forty companions were believed to have acted as scribes for the Qur'an. Twenty-two such persons are mentioned by name in the Hadith. Among them were well known persons, such as Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, Ali, ibn Masud, Abu Huraira, Abdullah bin Abbas, Abdullah bin Amr bin al-As, Aisha, Hafsa and Umm-e Salama, Muawiyah bin Abu Sufyan, and four, from the Ansar: Ubai bin Ka'b, Muadh bin Jabal, Zaid bin Thabit and Abu Zaid".²

During the life time of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), parts of the Qur'an, though written, were scattered amongst his companions, much of it as private possession. But in the Battle of Yamama in 633, 700 Muslims who had memorized the Qur'an were killed. The death of Salim, however, was most

significant, as he was one of the very few who had been entrusted by Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) to teach the Qur'an.³ Consequently, upon Umar's insistence, Abu Bakr ordered the collection of the hitherto scattered pieces of the Qur'an into one copy.⁴ Zaid bin Thabit, Prophet Muhammad's (pbuh) primary scribe, was assigned the duty of collecting all of the Qur'anic text. The task required Zaid bin Thabit to collect written copies of the Qur'an, with each verse having validated with the oral testimony of at least two companions. Usually the written copies were verified by himself and Umar both of whom had memorized major portions of the Qur'an. Thus, eventually the entire Qur'an was collected into a single copy, but it still wasn't given any particular order. This compilation was kept by the Caliph Abu Bakr, after his death by his successor, Caliph Umar, who on his deathbed gave them to Hafsa bint Umar, his daughter and one of Prophet Muhammad's (pbuh) widows.⁵ By the time of the caliphate of Uthman bin Affan, there was a perceived need for the compilation of the Qur'an. The Caliphate had grown considerably large, bringing into Islam's fold many new converts from various cultures with varying dialects of Arabic. Also some converts spoke a variety of languages but were not well learned in Arabic and so a complete written text of the Qur'an had to be compiled. Uthman is said to have begun a committee, including Zayd and several prominent members of Quraysh to produce a standard copy of the text. Some accounts say that this compilation was based on the text kept by Hafsa. Other stories say that Uthman made his compilation independently, Hafsa's text was brought forward, and the two texts were found to coincide perfectly. Until this time there was reportedly only one written text of the Qur'an. According to Islamic accounts, this text was faithful to its original version. Thus, this became known as Al-Mushaf al-Uthmāni or

the "Uthmanic codex".⁶ Although the order of his earlier script differed from the Uthmanic codex, Ali accepted this standardized version. When the compilation was finished, sometime between 650 and 656, Uthman sent copies of it to the different centers of the expanding Islamic empire. From then on, thousands of Muslim scribes began copying the Qur'an.⁷ This is a brief sketch of collection and compilation of Qur'an. Now we may turn to earliest Translations and Commentaries of Quran

Earliest Translations

1. The first translator of the Qur'an was Salman Farasi, who translated Surah Fatihah in Persian during the 7th century.⁸
2. Other early translations were made for Emperor Negus of Abyssinia and Byzantine Emperor Heraclius, as both received letters by Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) containing verses from the Qur'an.⁹

Earliest Commentaries

Tanwir al-Miqbas

Tanwir al-Miqbas (Tafsir bin Abbas) is one of the oldest and prominent Sunni Tafsir, attributed to Abdullah bin Abbas and hence called "Tafsir ibn Abbas" Tanwir al-Miqbas is one of the most pivotal works for understanding the environment which influenced the development of Qur'anic exegesis.¹⁰

Hadith collection

The Prophet's (pbuh) sayings and actions are termed as Hadith. It is a source of Islamic teachings and law. It is obvious that, from the very beginning, the Muslims were interested in what the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said and did. Even during the life-time of the Holy Prophet (pbuh), it was

unavoidable for all Muslims to inquire, talk about, and transmit the sayings and actions of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Prophet's Companions, with wonderful memory, retained whatever they saw in his life and heard from him. Some of them even wrote them down.

However, it has been reported that Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) asked his Companions to abstain from writing other books with the Holy Qur'an. A *Hadith* of *Sahih Muslim* too states that Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) told: Do not write from me, and whosoever has written from me other than the Qur'an, he may erase that; and narrate from me, in which there is nothing wrong; and whosoever attributes falsehood to me, Hammam [narrator of the *Hadith*] says that he deems that he (Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)) said "deliberately", let him seek his abode in fire". This Hadith clearly shows that though the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) ordered the Muslims not to write from him other than the Qur'an, he asked them only to narrate from him (his sayings and deeds) to others and that there is nothing wrong in doing so.

Treatises of Ahadith compiled by Sahaba

Though the aforementioned Hadith of *Sahih Muslim* states that Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) forbade the writing of Ahadith (during the revelation period of the Qur'an, so as to protect it from any ambiguity or doubt), but many other Ahadith make it clear that Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) had stressed the need that his sayings should not only be memorized but must be transmitted and conveyed to others in written form. For this, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) allowed his Companions to write Ahadith, and some of them compiled collections of Ahadith in his life time with his consent. So, some of the Companions of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) started

compiling Sahifas (treatises) of Ahadith. Such as:

1. Sahifah Sadiqah compiled by Abdullah bin Amr bin Aas (d. 63 A.H.)¹¹
2. Sahifah of Ali bin Abi Talib (d. 40 A.H.)¹²
3. Sahifah of Rafi bin Khadij (d. 73 or 74 A.H.)¹³
4. Sahifah of Jabir bin Abdullah (d. 78 A.H.)¹⁴
5. Sahifah of Samurah bin Jundab (d. 60 A.H.)¹⁵
6. Abu Hurayrah (d. 59 A.H.) and Sahifah of Hamman ibn Munabbah.¹⁶
7. Sahifah of Abdul Rahman bin Auf (d. 95 A.H.)¹⁷
8. Sahifah of Abdullah bin Masud (d. 32 A.H.)¹⁸
9. Sahifah of Zayed bin Thabit (d. 45 A.H.). Zayed bin Thabit gave his collection of Ahadith, relating to laws of inheritance, the title Kitab Al-Faraaid, to Abdullah bin Abbas (d. 68 A.H.)¹⁹
10. Sahifah of Anas bin Malik (d. 93 A.H.). Anas bin Malik asked his son: O my son! Preserve this knowledge (Ahadith) by writing. Anas bin Malik has a Sahifah of Hadith which he used to show in public. His pupil Aban also used to listen and write Ahadith from him.²⁰
11. Urwa bin Zubair (d. 94 or 99 A.H.) and Qasim bin Muhammad (d. 101 A.H.) wrote and transmitted Ahadith from Ayesha (d. 49 or 57 A.H.)²¹
12. Saad bin Abada Ansari had collected some Ahadith in a booklet. It is said that his son used to narrate Hadith from this booklet. Imam Bukhari says that this booklet was copied from the book of Abdullah bin Abi Aofa

- who wrote it with his own hands.²²
13. Jabir bin Abdullah also had a booklet of Hadith.²³
14. Abu-Bakar sent a letter to Amr-bin al-Aas which contained Ahadith. Abu-Bakar wrote another letter to Anas bin Malik who was the governor of Bahrain. This booklet seems to be a copy of the Prophet's (pbuh) letter Kitab concerning the rules of Zakat.²⁴
15. Al-Bukhari recorded that during the conquest of Mecca, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) gave a sermon. A man from the Yemen, named Abu Shah, stood up and said: "O Allah's Messenger! Please write down these (words) for me!" Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) ordered: "Write down for Abu Shah!".²⁵
16. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) sent a letter which contained commandments about the blood money for murders and injuries and the law of retaliation to Amr bin Hizam. This letter was handed down to his great grandson, Abu Bakr bin Muhammad.²⁶
17. Abdullah bin Abbas (3 B.H.-68 A.H.), was so eager for knowledge that he would ask as many as 30 companions about a single incident. It seems he wrote what he heard and sometimes even employed his slaves for this purpose. The following scholars derived Hadith from him in written form: Ali bin Abdullah bin Abbas, Amr bin Dinar, Al-Hakam bin Miqsam, ibn Abu Mulaikah, Ikrimah, Kuraib, Mujahid, Najdah, Said bin Jubair.²⁷
18. Abdullah bin Umar bin al-Khattab (10 B.H.-74 A.H.) transmitted a large number of Ahadith, and was so strict in relating them that he did not allow the order of

a word to be changed even though it would not have altered the meaning. He had several books. One *Kitab* [book] which belonged to Umar, and was in his possession, was read to him by Nafi several times. The following derived Hadith from him in written form: Jamil bin Zaid al-Tai, Nafi, Said bin Jubair, Abd al-Aziz bin Marwan, Abd al-Malik bin Marwan, Ubaidullah bin Umar, Umar bin Ubaidullah.²⁸

“These are the blessed names of some of those Companions who kept a record of the Prophet’s (pbuh) utterances and addresses, judgments and verdicts on different issues, and his actions and deeds in all sets of circumstances”.²⁹

Unfortunately, these booklets of Hadith which were formulated in the life of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) are not present, but they became the part of some later books. Muhammad Mustafa A'zami in his work *Studies in Early Hadith Literature*, has listed and discussed some fifty Companions of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) who had recorded Hadith in written form.³⁰

Some important Sahifas mentioned above are discussed below:

Al-Saadiqah of Abdullah bin Amr

Abdullah bin Amr was the son of the famous Sahabi and military leader Amr bin al-Aas. He was the first Muslim who collected Ahadith in written form. He was an early convert to Islaam, who had suffered for its cause, had enjoyed the company of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) for many years, and lived long enough after he was gone to transmit the Ahadith which he had learnt from him. Although Abdullah bin Amr, lived during the period of the civil war, resembled Abdullah

bin Umar in keeping himself aloof from factional strife. His interest in perpetuating the way of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was intense. He wrote down all the Traditions which he had learnt from him, collecting a thousand of them in a Sahifah which he called Al-Saadiqah.³¹

Sahifah Hammam bin Munabbih

Hammam bin Munabbih (d. 132/750) was an Islamic scholar, from among the Tabain and one of the earlier narrators of Hadith. He was the son of Munabbih bin Kamil, and Wahb bin Munabbih was his brother.³² Hammam bin Munabbih, was one of the 9 students of Abu Hurairah.³³ He used to narrate the Hadith he heard from Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) to his 9 students. Out of all 9 students, only Hammam bin Munabbih's book has survived in manuscript form. It is thought that it was dictated by Abu Huraira himself.³⁴ It was later edited and published by Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah in 1961 in Hyderabad, India. **Sahifah Hammam bin Munabbih** is perhaps one of the earliest known Hadith collections.³⁵

Qisas al-Anbiya and Kitab al-Isra'iliyat of Wahb bin Munabbih

Wahb bin Munabbih was a Muslim traditionist of Dhimar (two days' journey from Sanaa) in Yemen; died at the age of ninety, in a year variously given by Arabic authorities as 725, 728, 732, and 737 C.E.³⁶ He is counted among the Tabi'in and narrated Isra'iliyat. His full name was Abu 'Abd Allah al-Šana'ani al-Dhimari or Wahb bin Munabbih bin Kamil bin Sirajud-Din Dhee Kibaar Abu-Abdullah al-Yamani al-San'ani.³⁷

He was brother of Hammam bin Munabbih, who is reported to have written 138 Hadiths in his Sahifa.³⁸

Among Wahb's many writings may be mentioned his "Qisas al-Anbiya" (Story of the Prophets) and "Kitab al-Isra'iliyat" (Book of the Israelites). The former, which is believed to be his earliest literary work, is, as its title indicates, a collection of narratives concerning Biblical personages, the accounts being drawn from Jewish folk-lore though presented in Islamic guise.³⁹

Prophet Muhammad's (pbuh) letters to the Heads-of-State

After the Treaty of Hudaybiyyah, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) decided to send letters to many rulers of the world, inviting them to Islam.⁴⁰ Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), according to the usually told Islamic historiography, sent ambassadors with such letters to Heraclius the emperor of Byzantium, Chosroes II the emperor of Persia, the Negus of Ethiopia, Muqawqis the ruler of Egypt, Harith Gassani the governor of Syria and Munzir bin Sawa the ruler of Bahrain.⁴¹ The manuscripts of the three letters (to Egypt, Rome, and the king of Nijashi), have been preserved.⁴²

Poetry

Hassan bin Thabit

Hassan bin Thabit (died 674) was an Arabian poet and one of the Sahaba, or companions of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). He was born in Yathrib (Madinah), and was member of the Banu Khazraj tribe.⁴³

In his youth he traveled to Al-Hirah and Damascus, and then settled in Madinah, where, after the advent of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), he accepted Islam and wrote poems in praise of him.⁴⁴ He was one of the best poets of the time, who

would often win poetry competitions and the like. He was a prime example of how the early Muslims were able to use their pre-Islamic talents for the cause of Islam.⁴⁵

Muhammad (pbuh) used to set up for him a pulpit in the mosque and stand by in evident enjoyment, while Hassan hurled from it stinging verses against the enemies of Islam.⁴⁶ This was one of the few occasions on which the Prophet (pbuh) seems to have tolerated poetry, and his reported comment is significant, "Allah aids Hassan with the Holy Spirit so long as he is defending or boasting of the Apostle of God."⁴⁷

Al-Khansa

Tumadir bint Amr bin al-Harth bin al-Shaidd al-Sulamiyah, usually simply called as Al-Khansa was a 7th century Arabic poet. She was born and raised in the Najd region (the central region of modern-day Saudi Arabia).⁴⁸ She met Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in 629 and converted to Islam. He is said to have been very impressed by her poetry.⁴⁹

In her time, the role of a female poet was to write Marthiya (elegies) for the dead and perform them for the tribe in public oral competitions. Al-Khansa won respect and fame in these competitions with her elegies for her brothers, Sakhr and Muawiyah, and four sons Yazid, Muawiyah, Amr and Amrah, who had died in the battle of Qadsiyah.⁵⁰ She is the best known female poet in Arabic literature.⁵¹

Labid

Labid (Abu Aqil Labid ibn Rabiah) (c. 560–c. 661), was another Muslim poet next to Hassan bin Thabit in the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). He belonged to the Bani Amir, a division of the tribe of the Hawazin. In his younger years he

was an active warrior, and his verse is largely concerned with inter-tribal disputes. Later, he was sent by a sick uncle to get a remedy from Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) at Madinah and on this occasion was much influenced by a part of the Qur'an. He accepted Islam soon after, but seems then to have ceased writing.⁵² During Umar's caliphate he is said to have settled in Kufa. Tradition ascribes to him a long life, but dates given are uncertain and contradictory. One of his poems is contained in the Mu'allaqat.⁵³

Other texts

Al-Jafr (book)

Al-Jafr is a mystical Shia holy book⁵⁴ compiled, according to Shia belief, from the book inherited by Hazrat Ali from Prophet Muhammad (pbuh).⁵⁵ Al-Jafr comprises two skin boxes in which were kept various books of the past Prophets and the books inherited from Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), Ali and Ahl al-Bayt, with each new Imam receiving them from his dying predecessor Imam, as well as the armor and weapons of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh).⁵⁶ Al-Jafr was one of the sources and origins of knowledge acquired by the 12 Imams and Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq took pride in having possession of Al-Jafr that contained the esoteric knowledge of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). The later Imams were accustomed to refer at times to the sacred and secret book of al-Jafr, which was left in their keeping by Ali and belief in the existence of al-Jafr with the Imams was firm, according to the Shias.⁵⁷ The Imams also learned the science of Huruf (letters of the alphabet) from al-Jafr and used this science to derive facts and rulings from al-Jafr. Al-Jafr was handed down among the Imams and is currently with Imam Muhammad al-Mahdi.⁵⁸ The material of

al-Jafr is parchment for writing made from animal skin.⁵⁹

The contents of Al-Jafr⁶⁰:

- Secret teachings for the 12 Imams.
- Knowledge of the past and future events, including the names of every king who would rule on earth.
- The knowledge of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), the past Prophets and the 12 Imams.
- The original Injil (holy book of Jesus), the original Torah (holy book of Moses), the original Zabur (holy book of David), the original Suhuf Ibrahim (Scrolls of Abraham) and the knowledge and history of the Prophets, life happenings, and other special mystical matters. These are all contained in one part of al-Jafr called al-Jafr al-Abyadh (the white al-Jafr). Al-Jafr al-Abyadh has 14 portions and each portion has 14 divisions.
- A bag that contains the armour and weapons of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), including the sword Zulfiqar, and the Islamic rules, directives and matters about and involving wars. These are all contained in the other part of al-Jafr called al-Jafr al-Ahmar (the red al-Jafr).
- Israelite Traditions.

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 23. <http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20081214125005AAWebE0>
 24. Abu Dawud, *Kitabul Ilm*, Hadith no:3 and Tirmidhi *Kitabul Ilm*, Hadith no:12.
 25. <http://www.islamreligion.com/>
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